

Message Text

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TO ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS

XMT AMEMBASSY PANAMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 055626

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO USUNNY MARCH 23,
FROM PANAMA REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 1652

E. O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UN, PN

SUBJ: SC MEETING IN PANAMA -- POLITICAL ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY: GOP BASKING IN SELF- PERCEIVED " VICTORY" IN
HOLDING SC MEETING. MEETING WILL RESULT IN ANOTHER
TWIST TO LEFT BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND DOMESTICALLY.
IT WILL MAKE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS MORE DIFFICULT AND
INCREASE STRAINS ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS DURING
COMING MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA OBVIOUSLY BELIEVES IT
HAS SCORED A GREAT VICTORY WITH THE HOLDING OF
THE SC MEETING IN PANAMA. STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS BY
TACK AND TORRIJOS REFLECT THEIR FEELING THAT WORLD
ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED ON PANAMA, THAT THE VAST MAJORITY
OF THE OPINION IS NOW SYMPATHETIC, AND THAT THE UNITED
STATES WAS EMBARRASINGLY ISOLATED BY HAVING TO USE
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THE VETO.

2. THE LEADERS OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT, NOW ON

SOMETHING OF AN EMOTIONAL HIGH, MAY IN WEEKS TO COME UNDERSTAND THAT THEIR " VICTORY" WAS A VERY CONDITIONAL ONE. IN FACT PRESS COVERAGE IN THE UNITED STATES AND WESTERN EUROPE WAS MUCH LESS THAN THE PANAMANIAN HAD HOPED. THIS WAS SIMPLY NOT A STORY THAT STAYED ON THE FRONT PAGE. PANAMANIAN MUST ALSO HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED BY THE LACK OF SUPPORT THEY RECEIVED FROM MOST OF THE LATIN AMERICANS. THEY MAY ALSO COME TO REALIZE THAT GOP EXCESSES IN RHETORIC HAVE CREATED FOR PANAMA A POORER IMAGE IN US PUBLIC AND CONGRESS, MAKING TREATY NEGOTIATIONS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT.

3. AS THEY THEMSELVES SAW IT, THE PANAMANIAN COULD NOT LOSE BY HOLDING SC MEETING. EVEN BEFORE THE MEETING HAD REACHED ITS CLIMAX FONMIN TACK IN NEWS CONFERENCE MARCH 20 WAS ABLE TO SAY THAT PANAMA HAD ALREADY ACHIEVED ITS OBJECTIVES. INVITING UN DELEGATES FOR MEETING, ACCORDING TO TACK, HAD HELPED ATTRACT WORLD INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION AND PUBLIC SYMPATHY. THIS, ACCORDING TO TACK, WILL GENERATE WORLD MORAL OPINION FOR A SETTLEMENT AS IT HAD IN RECENT VIETNAMESE PEACE. IT ALSO APPEARS TRUE THAT PANAMANIAN DETERMINED EARLY ON THEIR BEST INTERESTS WERE SERVED BY TAKING A HARD POSITION, AS EITHER US ACQUIESCENCE TO A GOOD RESOLUTION (FROM THE GOP VIEWPOINT) OR A VETO SERVED PANAMANIAN INTERESTS EQUALLY WELL. AS THE MEETING NEARED ITS END, HOWEVER, THE TORRIJOS- TACK LEADERSHIP TEAM WAS PERSUADED THAT US VETO WOULD BE EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO RALLY THE PANAMANIAN POPULATION AND TO DRAMATIZE THEIR CASE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE. THE HEADY FEELING OF IMPORTANCE IMPARTED TO THE GOP BY THE PRESENCE AND SYMPATHETIC ATTENTION OF SO MANY FOREIGN VISITORS MUST BE CONSIDERED AS A MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR AT WORK ON THE PANAMANIAN DURING THE MEETING.

4. TO THE PANAMANIAN, THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE MEETING WAS SIMPLY THAT IT ALL CAME OFF. THEY HAVE HAD ALL ALONG A STRONG CONVICTION THAT SIMPLY SEEING THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CANAL ZONE AND APPARATUS IS ENOUGH TO CONVERT ANY OBSERVER. ALTHOUGH GOVT. OPERATIONS WERE HEAVILY STRAINED BY SC UNDERTAKING, ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETING IN FACT CAME OFF QUITE WELL. HOTELS WERE JAMMED AND DELEGATES SUFFERED FROM HEAT AND CROWDING AT SOME EVENTS, SUCH AS CANAL AND CONTADORA TRIPS. TECHNICAL AND SECURITY DETAILS, NONETHELESS, WERE VERY WELL HANDLED. GOVT. CALLED ON FULL RESOURCES OF PANAMANIAN COMMUNITY TO MAKE INTERNATIONAL GUESTS COMFORTABLE. EVEN BACKGROUND ATMOSPHERE WAS WELL

ORCHESTRATED. WELL BEHAVED GALLERIES WERE PRODUCED WHEN NEEDED AND THE PRESS WAS CUED TO GIVE MODERATE IF ONE- SIDED COVERAGE OF THE EVENTS.

5. THE SESSION TESTED INTERNATIONAL OPINION ON THE CANAL ISSUE. ALMOST ALL SPEAKERS GAVE SOME MEASURE OF SUPPORT TO THE PANAMANIAN POSITION, AND MOST WERE DEEPLY CRITICAL OF US " NEO- COLONIALIS.". CRITICISM OF US WAS FAR LESS UNIVERSAL ON SPECIFIC, CONCRETE ISSUES, BUT GENERAL TONE INDICATES DIFFICULTIES WE WOULD EXPERIENCE AROUND THE WORLD IN THE EVENT OF A CONFRONTATION WITH PANAMA.

6. PRINCIPAL THEMES STRESSED WERE SOVEREIGNTY AND PERPETUITY. THE SOVEREIGNTY THEME HAS BEEN WELL DEVELOPED IN LAST FOUR MONTHS BY GOP TO THE POINT THAT IT IS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AND EASILY UNDERSTOOD POSITION. FOREIGN DELS GRASPED IT AND PLAYED IT BACK. THE FRIENDLY SALVADORIAN REP CAPSULIZED PANAMANIAN POSITION AS SIMPLY WANTING TO RID PRESENT RELATIONSHIP WITH US OF EVERYTHING THAT DEROGATED FROM NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY. GOVT. HAS POLISHED SOVEREIGNTY POSITION SO THAT IT HAS DIRECT MEANING TO ENTIRE LOCAL POPULATION. PERPETUITY ISSUED WAS USED AS WHIPPING BOY IN SC DEBATE TO SHOW UNREASONABLENESS OF US POSITION, AND TACTIC PROBABLY PERSUADED MANY DESPITE OUR FREQUENT DENIALS OF A PERPETUAL INTENT TO REMAIN HERE. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE FREQUENT REFERENCES IN DEBATE TO MILITARY BASES IN CANAL ZONE, THE LEGAL CONCEPT OF NEUTRALITY WAS NOT DEVELOPED NOR DEBATED. MUCH OF THRUST OF PANAMANIAN PRESENTATION, ESPECIALLY ON SUCH ISSUES AS RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, WRE BASICALLY ATTEMPTS TO SHAME US.

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7. ALTHOUGH BOYD WAS CLEARLY INSTIGATOR AND ESSENTIAL ADVISOR ON STRICTLY UN ASPECTS OF MEETING, SHOW BASICALLY BELONGED TO JUAN TACK. HIS HAND WAS EVIDENT IN FOREIGN OFFICE' S INTERNATIONAL BUILD UP TO SC; HE CEMENTED COOPERATION WITH PERU IN HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL PRE- SC VISIT TO LIMA; AND THE THEMES OF TORRIJOS; KICKOFF SPEECH WHICH SHOWS TACK' S DRAFTING AND THE WORDING OF HIS OWN PRESENTATIONS WERE WEL CRAFTED. IN CONTRAST TO BOYD' S SAGGING AND UNCERTAIN APPEARANCE IN THE PRESIDENT' S CHAIR, TACK STEPPED FORWARD WITH CONFIDENCE AND COLLNESS TO ARGUE PANAMANIAN POSITION. THE PARTS OF TACK' S SPEECHES WHICH WOUNDED US MOST ARE TACK' S OWN DOING. HE HAS A WELL DEVELOPED " ANTI- IMPERIALIST" PHILOSOPHY THAT SHOWS UP IN HIS ATTACKS ON US ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND OAS, AND HE HAS A PERSONAL BITTERNESS. THESE HAVE ALL BEEN SEEN BEFORE BUT NEVER SO WEL PUT TOGETHER.

8. MEETING ITSELF WILL HAVE EFFECT ON PANAMA'S INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC POLICIES. THE MEETING IS PRODUCING ANOTHER GOP COURSE CORRECTION FURTHER TO THE LEFT. THE LACK OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FROM MANY OF THE LA'S HAS THROWN INTO SHARP FOCUS THE VERY POSITIVE SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM THE LEFT-LEANING COUNTRIES OF THE THIRD WORLD. TORRIJOS AND TACK HAVE POLITELY INDICATED PANAMA WILL BE FORGING TIES WITH COUNTRIES SUPPORTING PANAMA. DURING PERIOD OF MEETING ITSELF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE OPENED WITH BULGARIA, LYBIA AND GUINEA.

9. THE COOPERATION WITH PERU IN CONSTRUCTING STRATEGY FOR THE MEETING IS LIKELY TO RESULT IN CLOSER TIES BETWEEN THE TWO "REVOLUTIONARY" MILITARY REGIMES. TORRIJOS HAS OFTEN SPOKEN ADMIRINGLY IN THE ABSTRACT OF THE PERUVIAN MILITARY BUT IT IS LIKELY THAT THE PANAMANIAN LEADERS WILL BE LOOKING CLOSELY AT WHAT THE PERUVIANS HAVE DONE AT HOME AND BE ENCOURAGED BY THE EXAMPLE TO MORE FUNDAMENTAL DOMESTIC CHANGES.

10. CUBAN FONMIN ROA ATTENDED EACH SC SESSION HERE AND HAD HIGH PROFILE IN PRESS. THE TIES BETWEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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CUBA AND PANAMA WILL GROW AND, DESPITE TACK'S NEWS CONFERENCE DENIAL THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS IS BEING DISCUSSED, THE LOGIC IS THAT THE CLOSE EXCHANGE BETWEEN CUBA AND PANAMA DURING THE EXPRESS BOAT NEGOTIATIONS AND THEN ON THE SC MEETING WILL LEAD TO FORMAL RELATIONS. GOP HAS MAINTAINED FOR LAST SEVERAL YEARS THAT AS OAS MEMBER IT WOULD RESPECT ITS COMMITMENTS. RECENT TORRIJOS STATEMENTS EVEN BEFORE SC OPENING REMARKS HAVE HOWEVER ADDED TO THAT POSITION A CRITICISM OF BLOCKADE. IN VIEW OF TACK'S DISDAIN FOR OAS AND NEW PERUVIAN FRIENDSHIP WE SUSPECT THAT GOP WILL BE IN VANGUARD OF STATES TRYING TO RESOLVE CUBAN QUESTION IN OAS AND OTHER FORUMS.

11. SC MEETING LEAVES TORRIJOS GOVT. IN STRONG POSITION DOMESTICALLY. THE NATIONALIST ISSUE THAT UNITES ALL POLITICALLY AWARE PANAMANIANS HAS BEEN ADVANCED FARTHER THAN EVER BEFORE -- NOT SIMPLY BY RHETORIC BUT IN LEGAL FORUM THAT IS UNDERSTOOD BY POPULACE WHICH IS SCHOOLED AS FEW OTHERS IN INTERNATIONAL LEGAL TRADITIONS. IN PUTTING MEETING TOGETHER GOVT. PURPOSELY SOLICITED PARTICIPATION OF GROUPS THAT NORMALLY OPPOSE IT. PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS WERE PLACED IN HANDS OF POPULAR NEWSCASTER MARIO VELASQUEZ WHO HAS OFTEN BEEN THORN IN GOVT'S SIDE. PROMINENT MEMBERS OF TRADITIONAL UPPER

CLASS WERE INVITED TO SERVE AS HOSTS FOR VISITING DELEGATIONS AND AS OFFICIAL OBSERVERS. JULIO LINARES, A STRONG CRITIC OF TORRIJOS', WAS CALLED INTO OFFER HIS EXPERTISE ON INTERNATIONAL LAW. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FELT COMPELLED TO OFFER ITS SUPPORT. BEFORE LEAVING TOWN FOR ROME MEETING ARCHBISHOP MCGRATH ISSUED STATEMENT REGARDING PANAMA'S GOVT ASPIRATIONS AND THE JESUITS MAGAZINE DIALAGO WHICH USUALLY FEATURES ANTI-GOVT. MATERIAL DEVOTED LATEST ISSUE TO SC ARTICLES. LOCAL COMMUNIST ACTIVISTS WERE CO-OPTED BY GOVT LEADERSHIP ON ISSUE AND OPTED NOT TO PLAY AN INDEPENDENT ROLE IN SC EVENTS. LOCAL COMMUNISTS OF COURSE WILL GAIN STATURE FROM HEATED UP ATMOSPHERE AND CLOSER RELATIONS WITH CUBA, AND WILL PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE ON THE DOMESTIC SCENE HERE.

QWM WHILE EXPRESSING SATISFACTION AT LAST WEEK'S EVENTS AND EVEN JUBILATION AT US VETO GOVT HAS SO FAR
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BEEN DELIBERATELY VAGUE ON ITS IMMEDIATE NEXT MOVES. TORRIJOS AND TACK PROBABLY DO NOT HAVE FIRM PLAN AND WISH FIRST TO MEASURE DOMESTIC AND US REACTION. IN THE SHORT RUN THEY MAY BE SOMEWHAT CONCILIATORY TO US BEFORE GRADUALLY INTENSIFYING PRESSURE AGAIN. FOR ALL THE BRAVADO US VETO MUST BE SOBERING EXPERIENCE AND US PERFORMANCE IN SC WILL HELP CURB OCCASIONAL PANAMANIAN TENDENCY TO THINK THAT ORNERLY HARD LINE OBSTINANCE IS BEST WAY TO GET US TO GIVE ON ANY ISSUE.

13. ONE OTHER POSSIBLE REASON FOR GOVT'S FAILURE TO OUTLINE FUTURE STEPS MORE CLEARLY IS DESIRE FOR SURPRISE. THIS MAY TAKE DIPLOMATIC FORM. PANAMANIANS HAVE INDICATED TO SC DELS THEY WILL AGAIN BRING CANAL QUESTION TO SC AND WILL BRING IT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN AUTUMN.

14. DESPITE FOREIGN SUPPORT RECEIVED FOR ITS POSITION, GOP DOES NOT REALLY SEEM TO EXPECT A SOFTENING OF THE US NEGOTIATING POSITION AND DOES NOT ANTICIPATE A NEW TREATY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. PANAMANIAN GAME PLAN AS WE SEE IT REMAINS THE SAME AS OUTLINED IN CASP WITH INTENSIFICATION OF PRESSURE THROUGH ALL AVAILABLE MEANS. CONFRONTATION IS ALMOST CERTAINLY NOT BEING PLANNED BY GOP FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE, BUT COULD QUICKLY EMERGE AT ANY TIME IN THIS ENVIRONMENT. SAYRE UNQUOTE ROGERS

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